Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services

Surveillance Testing for Influenza
Laboratory Guidance

The following guidelines have been developed to enhance the detection of seasonal influenza, and to allow season-long monitoring of the circulating strains of influenza and anti-viral resistance.

Fee-Waived Testing	
Select Hospital Laboratories	*For the week ending October 9, 2010,* thirteen (13) designated hospital laboratories will begin submitting up to two (2) fee-waived specimens or isolates per week. Special submission forms will be provided.
Other Clinical Laboratories	Thirty four (34) additional clinical laboratories have been designated around the state to provide specimens for confirmation of rapid tests or ILI. Three (3) fee-waived tests are provided to each lab. Special submission forms will be provided.
Sentinel Providers	Sentinel providers, designated by DPHHS CDEpi, will submit up to five (5) fee-waived sentinel specimens. Special submission forms will be provided.
Clusters/Outbreaks	Consultation with MT DPHHS-CDEpi (406-444-0273) is required prior to specimen submission. Up to three (3) fee-waived specimens may be tested to determine the cluster type and subtype. *Note: A cluster of influenza is defined as five or more individuals who have onset of influenza-like illness (ILI) within 7 days of each other **AND** are associated with the same institution, activity, or event (i.e., school, travel, or work).*

Laboratory Surveillance specimens will be screened for both Influenza A and Influenza B by PCR, and tested by viral culture. All Influenza A positive specimens will be subtyped. A representative sample of these specimens will be referred for further characterization and anti-viral resistance testing.

Universal Transport Media and requisition forms for influenza testing designated as fee-waived will be provided by MTPHL to the designated hospital laboratories, other clinical laboratories and to the sentinel providers for surveillance testing.

Specimen Collection

- Specimens should be collected within 3 days of onset of symptoms. After 3 days, the viral shedding is reduced, and may no longer be detectable, depending on the assay.
- Respiratory Specimens (nasopharyngeal swab, throat swab, nasal aspirates, nasal swab, or combination NP swab/Throat swab, nasal washings) must be submitted in Universal Transport Media (UTM) in a cold condition. Flocked nasopharyngeal and regular swabs are provided in the UTM kits.
- Do not submit a swab or residual fluid that has been used for Rapid testing; these will be rejected as an unsatisfactory specimen. A second swab must be collected and submitted.
- Universal Transport Media can be stored at room temperature before specimen collection. However, after the specimen has been introduced to the transport media, it is recommended that the specimen be stored at refrigerator temperature (NOT frozen), and transported to the MTPHL in a cold condition.
- Specimen can be transported via courier or the mail as a Biologic Substance, Category B, and should be received within 48 hours of collection.

Requisition Forms

- Pre-printed surveillance forms will be provided to each designated laboratory or sentinel provider.
- Please include results of Rapid Testing (if performed), whether the patient is hospitalized, and other pertinent information.

Turn Around Time

- Specimens received in the MTPHL by 8 am (Mon – Fri) will have PCR screening completed by 5 p.m. on the same day of receipt, and in most instances, Influenza A subtyping will also be completed the same day.

If you have any questions, call the Montana Public Health Laboratory at 1-800-821-7284.